# F.O.B., Weimar

By Will Cuppy

MY LIFE AND WORK. By Henry Ford in collaboration with Samuel Crowther. Doubleday, Page & Co. 1922.
LIFE OF GOETHE. By P. Hume Brown. With a prefatory note by Viscount Haldane. Henry Holt & Co. 1920.

FOR several years I have been casually remarking, at what I took to be appropriate times and places, that I wanted extremely to own the late Professor Hume Brown's "Life of Goethe." Every one knew it, but no one seemed to care. And then a kind friend read an essay by Mr. Burton Rascoe on how to give books for Christmas and remembered my hardly repressed desire. I am now the proud owner of the biography. Faith, hope and persistency have their reward.

The essay, of course, deserves a great part of the credit for sowing in my friend's heart the seeds of altruism and self-forgetfulness. (Planting the sprouts of these things might be a better figure, in view of the early harvest.) Surely, whatever stimulates the Yuletide spirit of giving is well done. I know that I am never so filled with simple kindliness and such a sense of the true nobility and beauty of life as when some one gives me something.

And so I thought with real affection of the essayist, whose words had given my friend the happiness of spending $10 on me. It hardly occurred to me, really, to wonder why he hadn't sent me something himself, although heaven knows he could well afford to do so. "Oh, well," I reflected, "who am I, anyway, when he has so many others, such as they are, to remember? I'm sure he thought of it just the same—maybe."

I was to be pleasantly surprised and also shamed for my unworthy meditations. I was to learn that Mr. Rascoe's interpretation of the spirit of Santa Claus was not mere idle persiflage, but had really appealed to his inward self, whether before or after writing. Yesterday I received a large parcel from him with a note explaining that he had sent it early for fear he might forget it in the Christmas rush. What were my feelings (I leave this to the reader) when underneath the festive wrappings appeared "My Life and Work," by Henry Ford, a splendid gilt-edged volume in perfect condition, except that a bottle of ink had been spilled on the front cover.

The same mail brought a letter from Anonymous deploring in urgent and almost heated words the mood of cheerfulness that seems to have come over some of the book reviewers since the war. I thoroughly agree that there is far too little gloom in certain quarters. My own Christmas gifts so far have brought it home to me that no one can hardly be contented with things as they are. I earnestly hope that my correspondent will find things more depressing during the coming year. Perhaps I can help him and at the same time rebuke the flippant critics to whom he refers by reviewing my presents together as pessimistically as possible.

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IN MAKING a comparative study of Goethe and Mr. Ford (for no less than that is my intention) it strikes me as strange that the commentators heretofore have never noticed their points of similarity, of which there are several, although I must admit that the differences are even more striking. The main point is that both men are household words and that their principal achievements are equally famous. The flivver and Faust are known wherever there are bumps in the road or devils by the way, and that is saying much. In fact, it is saying enough, were it not for one serious interest in Goethe literature in the light of the newest Fordiana.

The Goethe biography alone runs to 871 sizable and closely printed pages, so that I may have to leave out a few of the things that might be said. I shall merely summarize the chief dates, pointing out that the earliest form of Faust, or the Ur-Faust, as we call it, was conceived in 1763, and the complete vehicle issued from Weimar sixty-nine years later, in 1832, while the first workable Ford, or the Ur-flivver, was given to the world in 1892, and the completed version, or Model T, in 1908. I give these dates, although they were already known, and it seems rather like carrying hops to Weimar, as well as skips and jumps to Detroit.

As for a general judgment on the quality of their literary labors, Goethe's reputation as an intellectual poet is now so firmly established that I am afraid to compare him unfavorably with Mr. Ford. Therefore I feel bound to state that Mr. Ford's book impresses me in spots with a lack of what my grandmother used to call fundamental brainwork. Or was it my school teacher who was always throwing that at me? Perhaps that wasn't the exact expression, after all. Anyway, whatever it was, most of the other commentators agree that Goethe had a little too much of it.

In his actual *modus scribendi* Mr. Ford has not been able to keep at all times to Goethe's ideal of classical restraint, his style reminding one more, though not much more, of the German author's *Sturm und Drang* period. Mr. Ford's style comes nearer resembling that of *Gotz von Berlichingen*, or even the later *Wahlverwandtschaften* than the more classical *Iphigenie auf Tauris* or the *Achilleis*. One notes the weakness which Goethe himself detected in Byron, the *Hang zum Unbegrenzten*, the straining after the unlimited. And where the note of simplicity is struck, it is apt, as Professor Brown says of Hermann und Dorothea, to become *simplesse*, and, at times, even *naiserie*.

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I CONFESS that I began my study with a slight prejudice against the author of "My Life and Works." I am subject to the autobiographical blues, and as I feared would be the case, an acute attack was brought on when I read Mr. Ford's remarks on repetitive labor in his factories. "We have now two general principles in all operations," he declares, "that a man shall never have to take more than one step, if possibly it can be avoided, and that no man need ever stoop over." The laborer "does as nearly as possible only one thing with only one movement." When Mr. Ford discovered that twenty-eight men were making only 175 piston rod assemblies a day, he got seven men to turn out 2,600 in eight hours by having them stop shifting their feet.

I found it difficult after reading this to concentrate upon my task of exegesis. I felt so free and untrammeled because I was not making piston rod assemblies for Mr. Ford that I devoted myself entirely to stooping over, shifting my feet and making useless movements of all kinds. I pitied the poor workmen, too, until Mr. Ford informed me they now prefer not to shift their feet. You'd think it would make them shiftless, but it doesn't. On the contrary. Besides, "we shift men whenever they ask to be shifted," and, of course, that includes the feet, too.

Both authors have only the highest and noblest of advice to offer in all fields. Both say that we can be happy if we will only be industrious and good. It is no secret that Goethe declared:

> "He only gains his life and freedom,
> Who daily has to conquer them anew."

Mr. Ford doubtless means something of the same sort when he remarks: "Business is never so healthy as when, like a chicken, it must do a certain amount of scratching for what it gets."

It is not impossible that Goethe and Mr. Ford might have been of great mutual assistance had chronological conditions made it possible. For instance, the author of "Faust" might not have taken sixty-nine years to the task if Mr. Ford could have told him face to face, as he does us: "There is a tendency to keep monkeying with styles and to spoil a good thing by changing it."

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OTHER strictures upon the artistic temperament might not have been so welcome. "We speak of creative artists in music, painting and the other arts," says Mr. Ford, adding a moment later, "We have limited the creative faculty too much and have used it for too trivial ends. We want men who can create the working design for all that is right and good and desirable in our life." Can he mean the Model T?

Goethe, on his part, with the intuition of genius seems to have foreseen certain developments in the automobile trade. His well known epigram, "Ohne Hast, Ohne Rast," clearly points toward an activity which shall comprehend and utilize the ever-moving resources of ourselves and our environment, yet without unseemly speed, a phenomenon which we of this age have been privileged to witness.

I have saved my most vital contribution to the subject until now. At Göttingen in 1801 Goethe was moved to reflect that the sight of a horse and rider is almost the only instance in nature of "purposeful restraint in action, the exclusion of anything arbitrary, indeed even of the element of chance." Now, as Dr. Smith Ely Jelliffe would admit, a Ford is only a horse with a negative sign attached, so that here we have Goethe's final and matured opinion of the flivver.

# Paris News Letter

By Lewis Galantière

FRANCE is the land that produces the naughty books which wicked women, lying on tiger skins, always read in their moments of leisure. It is rather piquant to observe that in this same country two of the novels which are favorably mentioned for the Goncourt Prize contain no human characters at all. One of these is "Le roman de la rivière," by Georges Ponsot, a Crès publication; the other is Adrien Le Corbeau's "Le gigantesque," published by Charpentier.

"Le roman de la rivière" is a delightful and poetic story whose action passes at the bottom of a river and whose actors are all fish. For ten years, or since I first read "The Crock of Gold," I have been prejudiced against fish. You may recall the words of the philosopher in their regard. He is speaking of water and of its general inutility and he has occasion to voice to Meehawl MacMurrachu his opinion of fish. "I have often fancied," he says, "that fish are dirty, sly and unintelligent people—this is due to their staying so much in the water, and it has been observed that on being removed from this element they at once expire through sheer ecstasy at escaping from their prolonged washing."

Well, it is a very pretty theory and I confess that I was taken in by it to an unreasonable degree. But M. Ponsot has converted me to another point of view. Certainly, the next time that voluble little James Stephens turns up in Paris I shall have it out with him on the "terrasse" of the Dome cafe at Montparnasse (where I should never go except to see him). However, about this book. It displays fish to be pretty much as we are, save that they evince no hypocrisy and believe in direct action to a greater degree than even the Bolshevists. I doubt if Lenin, for example, would have swallowed the Czar whole, beginning with his head, and yet that is what Narcisse did to his enemy when he was still a very little pike and had no idea of succeeding Grand Ferré as king of the river. Fish are honest people; the weak fear the strong without pretending it is respect they feel.

They are intelligent people; they keep away from those they fear. Their manners, I was interested to learn, are almost as perfect as those of the Chinese, and while they hold no ceremonies for the dead (which is, after all, an outmoded superstition) they respect their elders and harken to their wisdom. And this wisdom is no mean thing. Hear Barbich speak at the Council of the King: "Far from me, indeed, is the detestable idea that your people have the right to dispose of themselves. I do not ask you to consult them. You know their most secret thoughts, since you eat them. And I am not at all certain that if you were to liberate them they would not be moved by habit to put their fate back between your teeth. If they should change masters," the barbel continued, "they would be the playthings of the new master to-morrow as they are yours to-day."

And hear the wisdom of Kiss, the aged eel: "Kiss stretched herself in the mud and reflected at length on the problem of happiness. As she could find no solution acceptable to an old eel she glided into the grass of the field and gobbled a little green frog that was chasing a blue fly." Charming, isn't it? So is the entire book. It is being published in English and ought to be brought out with appropriate illustrations.

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"LE GIGANTESQUE" is another affair. It should be taken less seriously than "Le roman de la rivière," but I am obliged to consider it in a more serious manner. M. Le Corbeau's hand is elegant and fine. He writes excellently and—when one has got into the book—very interestingly, but he writes of "deep" things, and try as he may he cannot excite me over his hero, a 6,000-year-old sequoia, as much as M. Ponsot interested me in his pike. M. Le Corbeau has written a Roman philosophique. When we were younger we were all going to write contes philosophiques à la manière de Rémy Gourmont. Here is one that seems to me a mingling of Gourmont and Maeterlinck; the biology is the Frenchman's, the metaphysics the sober Belgian's. There are splendid pages in this book. The chapters called "Les contrastes identiques," "Métamorphoses" and "Mélanges au clair de lune" are filled with a poetry, a dignity and a stimulation to thought for which the reflective reader will be grateful. The life of man in its relation to the life of the universe is M. Le Corbeau's preoccupation. "Que savons nous, en réalité, des sensations spéciales animant les couples inhumains, de la fièvre fécondatrice des plantes, de la sympathie grancieuse qui précipite les planètes dans l'orbite de leurs soleils?" The answer, evidently, is "Nothing," but the question is not idle. "Dans nos rêveries," he continues, "dans nos baisers, dans nos spasmes, voyons plûtot un apport à la loi de l'universelle crispation."

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SOME one wrote the other day to tell me that though I might, for all he knew, be a hilarious frequenter of the cafés on the Butte, the composer of this weekly letter was a "solemn littérateur." I reflect with some melancholy that he is doubtless right, though I suppose that when he comes again to France I shall have to pink him in the arm at 5 of the morning in the Bois de Boulogne. It doesn't matter, happily, since nobody in Paris sees these letters and is able to divine the real me, as my importinent correspondent has done. Nevertheless, if it will set at rest in my pasty notes, I will tell Earl Balch (for it was he) why Anatole France went to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize, despite his great age.

You must know, my dear Balch, that the President of the French Republic is one Alexandre Millerand, who was once a Socialist and is now a conservative and an enemy of his old party. It is equally important to remember that Mr. France was born a conservative and is therefore now a radical. When he was named to receive the literary prize he said to his entourage: "Decidedly, I shall have to go to Stockholm." "To Stockholm?" they cried. "But, cher maître, think of your age." "I am thinking of it," replied Mr. France, "and I am thinking, too, that I detest traveling and that I hate the north wind, but it can't be helped. If I go to Stockholm I shall receive the prize at the hands of the King. I dislike kings, but if I remain here Millerand will hand me the prize. I can't endure that fellow; I don't want him in my presence and, above all, I don't want to take anything from his hands." So he went.